

A Short History of Poughkeepsie's Upper Landing

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Chapter 1: Native Americans, the Dutch, and the English

When Henry Hudson and his crew first sailed past what is now the City of Poughkeepsie in 1609, they sailed into a region that had been inhabited for centuries by a mixture of Algonquin-speaking peoples from the Mahican, Lenape, and Munsee cultures. The people living closest to the waterfall called "*Pooghkepesingh*" were Wappinger, part of the Lenape nation. The Wappinger likely had ample reason to settle near the Pooghkepesingh falls – the river and the small stream that ran to it from the falls provided good places to fish, and the surrounding hills offered both protection and ample opportunities to hunt.

As the Dutch colony of New Netherland took shape along the banks of the Hudson River, the Dutch largely bypassed the river's east bank. The Dutch preferred settling on the river's mouth (now New York City), its northern navigable terminus (today's Albany), and landings on the western bank of the Hudson (such as the modern city of Kingston). As such, Europeans did not show up in force near the Pooghkepesingh falls until the late 17th century. By that time, the Dutch had lost control of their colony to the English. It was a mix of these two groups that started building what is now the city of Poughkeepsie.

On May 5, 1683, a Wappinger named Massany signed a deed giving control of the land around the Pooghkepesingh falls to two Dutch settlers, Pieter Lansingh and Jan Smeedes, who planned to build a mill on the small creek running from the falls. Like the Wappinger before them, Lansingh and Smeedes must have found much to like about the land. The small, fast stream could provide ample force to turn a water wheel, which could in turn power any number of economic ventures. There was also a large, rocky outcropping near the mouth of the creek,

which they called *Slangen Klip* (“Snake Cliff” in English). This cliff provided both an easy landmark to identify the property and some protection from the elements. With the deed to this attractive property in hand, Lansingh and Smeedes may have been the first Europeans to live on the banks of the Fall Kill, as the Dutch named the creek.

Over the next twenty years, Dutchess County and the town of Poughkeepsie slowly grew along the banks of the Hudson. In 1687, Robert Sanders and Myndert Harmense were issued a land patent encompassing the mouth of the Fall Kill by the governor of the colony of New York. Coming from a colonial authority, this deed superseded the earlier one signed by Lansingh, Smeedes, and Massany. To encourage emigration to the patent, the two landlords offered 100 pine boards, nails, assistance with masonry, and one hundred trees to any settler willing to lease a 48-acre plot from them. Harmense built the first recorded mill on the property in 1699, erected on the south bank of the Fall Kill. Travelers and traders coming to Poughkeepsie frequently landed their boats in the small, bow-shaped cove where the Fall Kill ran into the Hudson. This area became the northernmost landing commonly used by water traffic into Poughkeepsie, and became a center for economic activity for the following two centuries.

In the decades after Smeedes and Lansingh acquired rights to the Fall Kill/Slangen Klip plot, the property changed hands several times in a relatively short period, eventually coming into the possession of Leonard Lewis in 1710. Lewis was an important political, social, and economic figure in the early history of Dutchess County, representing the county in the colonial assembly and serving as the colonel of its militia. Lewis built a stone house and mill just above the Fall Kill, at the foot of the rocky outcropping then called Snake Hill. The house was likely one of the finest in the town, and may have been used for official meetings in place of a proper town hall. A 2013 dendrochronology report found that at least one oak ceiling joist dated to the

1710s still hangs in one of the structures still standing at the Upper Landing, possibly indicating that pieces of Lewis' house were used in later structures at the site.¹

As a seemingly endless stream of European settlers moved into Poughkeepsie in the first half of the 18th century, the original inhabitants of the region remained active in life in the region. This period was marked by both cooperation and conflict between the very different cultures inhabiting the Hudson Valley. In 1712, Native Americans living in the Catskills sent a belt of wampum to Poughkeepsie as part of a declaration of war against the town, just as they would have done when attacking another Native American village. Fortunately for Poughkeepsie, the war belt was not followed by an actual attack. In peaceful times, nearby Wappinger hunted wolves for the farmers of Poughkeepsie, including Leonard Lewis. The Wappinger earned a bounty of 5 shillings per wolf – about what a common British soldier made in a week.

After Leonard Lewis died in 1730, his property was split between his widow, Elizabeth, and his children – 11 divisions in all. Over the next 25 years, all but one of these divisions were purchased by local businessman Anthony Yelverton. In 1755, Yelverton sold the collected properties to Martin Hoffman, another local businessman. Hoffman went on to make numerous long-standing and important additions to the property.

By mid-century, the influx of European settlers (and their African slaves) had crowded out the area's original inhabitants. Some of the surviving Wappinger were pushed eastward, settling on a reservation in Stockbridge, Massachusetts along with the survivors of several other Native American cultures from New England. From the 1750s onward, control of the land around the *Slangen Klip* and the Fall Kill lay in the hands of the area's new arrivals. These colonists forged a new, uniquely American identity from the various nations they originally hailed from.

Chapter 2: The Upper Landing in War, Revolution, and the Republic

Martin Hoffman made a number of improvements and additions to his new property. The first of these was building a mill, reportedly raised on July 9, 1755, a mere six months after acquiring the property. Upon the completion of this useful new building, Hoffman and the men who had come from as far away as Rhinebeck and Fishkill to help build it held a “sham battle” in canoes to celebrate their hard work. As the men of Dutchess County played at war, a very real battle raged 400 miles to the southwest. In the first major battle of the French and Indian War, the British suffered a massive and embarrassing defeat on the banks of the Monongahela River in what is now Western Pennsylvania. Participants in the battle included a number of people who later served in the American Revolution, chief among them George Washington. The Revolution that Washington came to lead eventually made Poughkeepsie the capital of New York (for a time) and the mouth of the Fall Kill a bustling hub of activity.

Perhaps Hoffman’s most important contribution to his property was his construction of a dock in the small cove at the mouth of the Fall Kill, which was built sometime before 1757. It was this dock, built to service the mill on the property, which gave the Upper Landing its name sometime before the end of the century. He also built several other buildings on the plot. A 1764 sale of the property lists “houses, Mills, Mill houses, Store Houses, buildings...” on the land, giving the whole property a sizable value of £1,900. Despite putting so much money and effort into the property, Hoffman sold his plot to Dutchess County Sherriff Clear Everitt in 1760. From there, the land passed through a series of owners before being purchased by John Schenck, Jr. in 1772.

By the time the Schenck family came to own the property, a low boil of discontent with British control already existed in the colonies. The years before the battles of Lexington and

Concord on April 19, 1775 passed fairly quietly in Poughkeepsie, but the coming of war broke what calm remained. The Schencks sided with the Revolution, and John Schenck became one of the leading Patriots in the county, serving as an officer in the county militia. His most important job was serving as a commissary officer for both the State of New York and the Continental Army. In this vital role, John Schenck helped feed and clothe the thousands of soldiers from across the country who were stationed in the Hudson Valley during the war. As commissary, one of Schenck's responsibilities was the creation of depots and storage facilities for the supplies under his charge. To that end, Schenck's Landing – as the dock at the mouth of the Fall Kill was then called – became the main supply depot in Poughkeepsie.

During the busy, often chaotic years of 1776 and 1777, Schenck's businesses on the Fall Kill and the supply depot he established were involved in constructing defenses meant to keep the British out of the Hudson Valley. In one notable case, Schenck was ordered to procure "one hundred hogsheads of Lime, as many hard and soft Bricks as he can procure, (not exceeding four hundred thousand,) any number of Shingles not exceeding one hundred thousand, and ten thousand Shingle Lath"² for defenses to be built around the Spuyten Duyvil Creek in what is now the Bronx. Considering that this shopping list coincided nicely with the businesses at Schenck's Landing, it seems very likely that Schenck's own mills fulfilled this request – earning Schenck a tidy profit as a result.³ While not made at Schenck's Landing, cordage for ship rigging was stored in the supply depot there. This rope was transported to Lake Champlain, where it was used in the hasty construction of a fleet of boats made out of green wood by Benedict Arnold. Arnold's unlikely fleet turned back a British assault down Lake Champlain at the Battle of Valcour Bay, and in so doing saved the Hudson Valley from invasion until 1777.⁴

The docks of Poughkeepsie were not the only parts of the town to see increased activity during the war. After the British captured New York City in 1776 and burned Kingston in 1777, Poughkeepsie became New York's capital in 1778. This honor brought an increase in traffic into the city. While the Middle Landing (what is now Wayras Park at the end of Main Street) was the busiest of Poughkeepsie's three docks, the northernmost landing may have been the preferred place for the city's more notable visitors to disembark. In 1778, the Schencks sold their property on the Fall Kill to Robert Livingston "of the Manor," a scion of New York's wealthiest Patriot family. Robert, in turn, gave the land to his brother, Walter, who was at the time Speaker of the State Assembly. Livingston's new property, with its convenient dock, was likely an attractive and accessible stop for the many visitors and favor-seekers attendant to his new position in the state government. From 1778 until 1783, Poughkeepsie was one of several cities that played host to New York's government throughout the rest of the Revolution, kept safe from British attacks by the new fortresses at West Point and protected from the Loyalist and Indian raids that plagued the rest of New York by both distance and the Hudson itself.

In 1788, Poughkeepsie once again hosted a gathering of the state's notables in the form of New York's convention to ratify the newly-drafted federal Constitution. The New York debates were critical to the success of the document. During these debates, Federalists Alexander Hamilton and John Jay argued over the merits of the proposed Constitution with leading Antifederalists Melancton Smith and George Clinton. Eventually, the New York delegates agreed that the Constitution would be ratified, so long as a Bill of Rights was immediately submitted to the states to be tacked on to the document once it was established. During these debates, which included several members of the Livingston family, Walter Livingston's house

and dock were likely used again by Livingston's many friends and attendants. Thus, the Upper Landing may be linked in some small way to the creation of the US Constitution.

During this time a fine residence was built at the Upper Landing. This building survives today as the Hoffman House. Preservation architects have dated the main floors of this building as likely having been constructed in 1789. This building acted as both the home and office of the owners of Upper Landing from the late 1700s until the site's virtual abandonment over a century later.

Chapter 3: The Upper Landing at the Dawn of the Industrial Revolution

The last decade of the 18th century was a time of growth and productivity for both Poughkeepsie and the dock at the mouth of the Fall Kill. In 1790, Poughkeepsie was home to nearly 3,000 people, many of whom made a living on and around the Hudson. This number ballooned considerably over the next decade. Many residents were recently arrived, fleeing outbreaks of yellow fever in an increasingly crowded New York City. As Poughkeepsie grew, Livingston's dock on the northern end of the town served as a major entry point for building materials. A 1798 advertisement in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* provides a list of supplies coming onto the dock:

A large general Assortment of GROCERIES, Hardware, Iron mongery and Crockery Ware, which will be sold as low as at any retail store... Also, FOR SALE, A large quantity of Lumber, consisting of Boards, Plank and Joice... For Sale at the same place, A large quantity of Pulverized Plaister of Paris, at 6 shillings per bushel.⁵

This same advertisement also provides the earliest recorded instance of the Fall Kill dock being called by a new name: the Upper Landing.

By the time this advertisement was published, the Upper Landing had once again changed hands. Walter Livingston sold the property to his son Robert in 1796, though the younger Livingston apparently never lived there. The property was managed instead by a man named Israel Loring. By the turn of the century, Loring was supervising 100 acres of property that included two saw mills, a two-stone grist mill, a plaster-of-Paris mill, and a storehouse. The success of the timber and plaster mills is indicative of the rate of new construction in and around Poughkeepsie during these years.

While important, the Livingston/Loring era of the Upper Land was short-lived, as Robert Livingston sold the property in 1800. The new owners were Martin, Isaac, and Robert Hoffman, relatives of the earlier Martin Hoffman who had done much building on the site in the mid-1700s. Following in the family tradition, the Hoffmans continued to expand operations at the Upper Landing. Perhaps the biggest addition was regular sailings of the 76-ton sloop *Farmer*, partially owned by one of the Hoffmans. The *Farmer* sailed to and from New York City every other Wednesday, trading weeks with another sloop (not owned by the Hoffmans), the *Elizabeth*. Both sloops advertised berths for both passengers and cargo. These two vessels were joined by several others which called the town home, helping Poughkeepsie claim the title of “New York’s second seaport.”

Poughkeepsie’s importance as a site of industry and commerce led to efforts to better connect the town with other blossoming cities. In 1803, two new turnpikes supplemented the ever-present river commerce by connecting Poughkeepsie to New York City and Albany via the north-south Highland Turnpike, as well as to Sharon, Connecticut through the east-west Dutchess Turnpike. The year 1803 saw another influx of refugees from New York City, fleeing a new outbreak of yellow fever. This growth provided new opportunities for the Hoffmans at the

Upper Landing. An 1804 flyer published by the Hoffmans portrayed the Upper Landing as an all-encompassing center of business, focusing on the variety of grist, lumber, and plaster mills on the property. They also advertised the addition of two new sailing vessels, the *Edward* and the *Mary*, the latter of which was commanded by Abraham Hoffman. Modern readers, accustomed to a money-based market, may be surprised that the Hoffmans accepted payment for their goods and services in grain as well as cash. This grain would be ground at the grist mills at the Upper Landing, then sold by the Hoffmans.

In 1807, the Hoffmans welcomed businessman George Oakley into their partnership at the Upper Landing. Bringing in a fresh infusion of capital may have been a necessity: 1807 also saw the enactment of President Thomas Jefferson's Embargo Act, which cut off American shipping to the rest of the world in retaliation for Britain's and France's mutual disrespect for American sovereignty on the high seas. Rather than cripple the economies of the warring two nations (embroiled in the height of the Napoleonic Wars), the act did little more than hamstring American maritime trade. The economy of Poughkeepsie, tied inextricably to maritime trade out of New York City, was almost certainly affected by the embargo, and Oakley's buy-in to the partnership may have made up for the loss of other profits.

Oakley's arrival spurred a flurry of activity at the Upper Landing. Between 1807 and 1809, a series of advertisements were published to inform the public about new changes on the Fall Kill: a new storehouse, repairs to the old storehouse and mill, and other improvements. Of particular note was the addition of new grinding machines at the grist mill to make superfine flour, "manufactured from select parcels of wheat, in barrels and half barrels for use of families. This flour will be distinguished by the additional brand of the letter F. With a view to this design, a generous price will be paid for extraordinary good wheat."⁶

For all the new development, Oakley proved over-ambitious. By 1811, he was apparently suffering from financial difficulties, adjusting storage fees at the storehouse and slashing prices on plaster of Paris to boost sales. The instability caused by the approach of the War of 1812 proved to be the final straw, as Oakley looked to sell increasingly large parts of his holdings at the Upper Landing. In July of 1812, a month after the United States declared war on Great Britain, Oakley sold his controlling share of the shipping and storage operations back to the Hoffmans, only retaining ownership of the grist and plaster mills. Oakley also began dealing in cash only for certain goods – a move that reflected both his own difficulties and fears of a collapse in trade brought on by the soon-to-be-in-place British blockade.

While the War of 1812 did slow shipping on the Hudson, it was not the catastrophe that the American Revolution had been: the British never threatened New York City, and were content to leave the maritime Northeast states largely alone so long as they did the same to British shipping. Business at the Upper Landing continued during the war, focusing on local products rather than shipments to New York City. Advertisements published by the Hoffmans in 1814 thanked the community for their continued patronage, and publicized the continuing sailing of sloops out of the Landing. The most successful parts of the operation during these years were the lumber and plaster mills, fueling a storm of new construction in Poughkeepsie. Between 1810 and 1814, nearly 3,000 people moved into Poughkeepsie. The mills at the Upper Landing played a vital role in building the city of Poughkeepsie in the early 19th century.

Chapter 4: The Reynolds and Innis Era

With the end of the War of 1812 in 1815, America's economy started to expand once again. George Oakley, having survived the war years and seeing a good opportunity to turn a profit from interests in Upper Landing, sold part of his share of the business to George Reynolds

and Aaron Innis on October 10, 1816. Oakley used this sale to fund the purchase of a blacksmith shop on the Fall Kill belonging to Stephen Hoyt, which he then converted to a cut-nail factory in 1817. The factory also employed a blacksmith, Samuel S. Howard, who provided other metalwork.

Despite Oakley's continued experimentation and the steady management of the Hoffmans, Reynolds and Innis quickly became the driving force at Upper Landing. Shortly after buying into the business in 1816, they erected a new storehouse, which survived long enough to be remembered in photographs as the Fall Kill Store. In 1818, they acquired the Hoffmans' grist mill, which had anchored business at Upper Landing since the 1700s.

In addition to working as business partners, James Reynolds and Aaron Innis also became neighbors. Innis and his family moved into the Hoffman House. Reynolds moved into a three-story brick house, built between 1807 and 1810, just a few yards away.⁷ While the Reynolds family lived on the top two floors, the ground floor operated as an office and store from which the Reynolds and Innis could entertain clients and sell goods from their various interests at the Upper Landing.⁸

This dynamic period of growth screeched to a halt in 1819, when a financial panic shook the nation's economy. The causes of the panic were twofold: the government's substantial debts from the War of 1812 began to make themselves felt (leading first to inflation and then widespread bank collapses), and European demand for American grain plummeted as the continent rebuilt from the Napoleonic Wars. The bad times were felt at the Upper Landing. The new Reynolds-Innis partnership was in part dissolved as control of the grist mill passed back to the Hoffman family. More disastrous, though, was the fate of George Oakley. Just before the panic, Oakley had invested in yet another new business venture: a ferry boat powered by a team

of horses on a treadmill that would run between Upper Landing and Highland Landing in (what was at the time) New Paltz. The venture was authorized by the New York State legislature in March, 1819. This investment appeared to have consumed much of Oakley's money at the worst possible time. Two months after the legislature approved the ferry, Oakley was forced to run an advertisement in the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, stating that he:

Will commence selling by auction at his dwelling house, at 10 o'clock A.M. on Thursday the 13th inst. And will continue from day to day, till all is sold—the following articles, namely—a number of good BEDS, with their furniture—One elegant Sofa—one large Looking Glass, and several small ones—several Carpets—Dining and Tea Tables—a quantity of CHINA, GLASS & CROCKERY ware—one neat Marble CLOCK—one GOLD WATCH—One SILVER WATCH—... KITCHEN FURNITURE... Maps... books... PLEASURE WAGON AND HARNESS... Two MILCH COWS..., etc.⁹

A later advertisement claimed that Oakley was willing to sell the rest of his holdings at the Upper Landing “at a price suitable for the times.” This included the nail factory, several “dwelling houses,” a barn, an office building and the plaster, saw, and flour mills. The properties were sold off over the course of the next two years as Oakley searched for a source of cash.¹⁰

Oakley's loss was Reynolds' and Innis' gain. The two partners purchased most of Oakley's properties at the Upper Landing save one grist mill, which was purchased by John Laemberger. The partners also took over Oakley's interests in the horse-powered ferry company. The ferry, dubbed the *Intercourse*, began sailing out of the Upper Landing in 1819. According to *The History of Dutchess County*, the *Intercourse* replaced an earlier ferry that had been rowed by slaves. This improvement may have been driven by the changing landscape of freedom in early 19th century New York. In 1817, New York passed a law that promised to free the remaining slaves in the state by July 4, 1827, with emancipation being granted to slaves as they came of age.¹¹ While the identities and ages of the slaves who worked the ferry remains unknown, the era

of forced, unpaid labor was at last coming to a close. As such, a reliable replacement was needed, and the horse team ferry provided a fast-moving answer.

With the successful launch of the ferry and their acquisition of his other business interests, Reynolds and Innis had largely replaced George Oakley as the dynamic force behind growth at the Upper Landing. Oakley's involvement at the Upper Landing ended when the Middle District Bank foreclosed on his remaining holdings at the Upper Landing. On December 21, 1821, Oakley's former plot was sold to Reynolds and Innis for \$9,000. In the deed, the property was described as being:

“on northside of Fall Kill Creek at mouth... BEGINNING at southwest corner of the Dock and running east to east end of said dock... Then BEGINNING at southwest corner of water lot purchased by parties of the second part of George P. Oakley which lie at or near the southeast corner of Reynolds and Innis new house and running about east on a straight line to centre of creek under bridge at grist mill...”

Reynolds and Innis quickly set about improving their newly-acquired properties. In January of 1821, the two partners advertised the opening of a new mill, producing “superfine bolting cloth.” A later advertisement from July of that year listed Reynolds, Innis, and Jonathan C. Van Valkenburgh as owners of the sloop *Counsellor*, which likely docked at the Upper Landing. By 1823, the managers in charge of the ironworks and timber mill had been replaced, though it is unclear if they were evicted by Reynolds and Innis or left on their own accord. It is interesting that the new managers of these businesses, Samuel S. Howard and Horace Heath, advertised themselves as working at businesses “formerly belonging to Mr. G. P. Oakley” rather than mentioning Reynolds and Innis, possibly using a more familiar name to attract local customers.

In 1825, the [Nathan] Gifford, Reynolds & Innis Dyewoods company converted Martin Hoffman's 1755 mill to a factory for the extraction of natural dyes from trees. Many of these species of trees were exotic, and were shipped in from South America and Africa. Once taken off the dock at the Upper Landing, the wood was hauled into the factory. There, it was processed to create dyes which could be used for paints and fabrics. This lucrative business remained a staple of industrial development at the Upper Landing for the duration of the 19th century.

Chapter 5: The Upper Landing as a Hub of Commerce and Transport

The mid-1820s also saw an expansion of shipping traffic into the Upper Landing. In 1824, the monopoly on steamboat operation granted by the New York State legislature to Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston was dissolved. The result was an explosion in steamboat traffic on the Hudson. In 1826, the Upper Landing became home to the steamboat *Franklin*, which sailed regularly to New York City. Unlike the sloops that sailed from the landing every other week, the *Franklin* ran to New York three times a week. Steamboats tied Poughkeepsie and other towns of the Hudson Valley even more closely to New York City. Within a decade, the *Franklin* was joined by the towboat *Washington*, which the *Franklin* dragged along behind it on its trips to New York. Towboats such as the *Washington* offered a cheap way of increasing cargo capacity when speed or fuel economy was not an issue. These vessels were joined in 1835 by steamship *Congress*, which pulled the towboat *Clinton*, both of which made regular sailings north to Albany. As such, the businesses of the Upper Landing and the people of Poughkeepsie were able to fully enjoy their central position on the Hudson River. Reynolds and Innis, along with their partner James R. Cary, expanded their business by buying out the interests of Jonathan Van Valkenburgh in the various sloops, steamships, and towboats operating at the Landing in 1831.

In 1828, the Upper Landing also benefited from the opening of a new water passage to the west. In that year, the D&H Canal opened between Honesdale, Pennsylvania and Kingston, New York, connecting the coal mines of central Pennsylvania to the Hudson River Valley. Coal had quickly become the fuel of the fast-changing Industrial Age, powering the various mills, factories, and steamships of the Upper Landing. River barges, loaded at Esopus, carried coal down the Hudson to the Upper Landing, where it was used by various businesses and homes in Poughkeepsie for power and heat. This included “80 grist mills, 85 saw mills, 27 fulling mills, 32 carding machines, 8 cotton factories, 15 woolen factories, 6 iron works, 5 trip hammers, 11 distilleries, 1 rope factory, 1 dyeing & printing factory, 2 clover mills, 2 paper mills, 26 tanneries, [and] 1 brewery” operating in Poughkeepsie at the time.¹²

From 1832 until the mid-1840s, the Upper Landing had a new neighbor to its immediate north: the Whale Dock, owned and operated by the Poughkeepsie and Dutchess Whaling Companies (two separate businesses). The vessels of these companies sailed the North Atlantic, hunting whales for their valuable meat and blubber. After a successful catch, the whales were hauled aboard ship, then transported to the dock at Poughkeepsie. There, they were butchered and processed, making the area around the Upper Landing “a very odoriferous neighborhood.”¹³

The increase in the size and number of businesses in Poughkeepsie led to a corresponding increase in the likelihood of a major fire breaking out. As such, the residents of Poughkeepsie voted in 1831 to establish a “cistern or fountain sufficient to supply the village with water... for the extinguishment of fires” by diverting the Fall Kill.¹⁴ This resolution drew both strong criticism and several lawsuits from Reynolds, Innis, and other businessmen from the Upper Landing, who feared that damming the Fall Kill would weaken the flow of the creek and thus render useless the mills that relied on it for power. The legal wrangling pitted Reynolds and Innis

against one-time Upper Landing powerhouse George Oakley, who had recovered from his earlier economic reverses and established himself as a politician in Poughkeepsie. Oakley, as president of the Poughkeepsie Board of Trustees, eventually won out, with all legal challenges to the Fall Kill Reservoir being resolved by May of 1834. The reservoir was completed in November of the following year, but was rendered ineffective by a drought that struck late in 1835. As such, the much-celebrated reservoir was unable to contain a large fire that occurred on May 12, 1836, destroying a number of buildings between Main and Academy streets.

The late 1830s also saw William Reynolds, son of James Reynolds, become an important figure at the Upper Landing. In 1837, William Reynolds purchased some of the waterfront property along the Fall Kill from his father and Aaron Innis. The following year, Aaron Innis died, depriving Upper Landing of one of the men who had shaped it into an industrial powerhouse. In 1839, William Reynolds assumed a leading role in his father's remaining business interests. While James Reynolds still pursued a number of business interests in Poughkeepsie, his son became the new driving force at the Upper Landing.

Chapter 6: Rail and Steam at Upper Landing

Under the capable hand of William Reynolds, both industry and shipping continued to flourish at the Upper Landing during the 1840s. The Innis (formerly Hoffman) house underwent some renovations, adding some Greek Revival architectural features to fit the fashion of the times. These alterations entirely removed the building's original roof, adding an extra half-story to the house and a double-hipped roof to cover it.¹⁵ However, the 1840s also brought a new development to the Poughkeepsie waterfront: the railroad.

Railroads first appeared in the United States in the 1830s, with one of the first lines opening between Albany and Schenectady in 1831. As railroads began to traverse the country, the Hudson Valley continued to rely on river-based commerce and travel. However, convenience and tradition could only serve as a bastion against technological improvements for so long. In 1842, the Poughkeepsie town council created the Hudson River Rail Road Central Finance and Correspondence Committee, which included influential businessmen Isaac Platt and Matthew Vassar. This committee set about organizing local support for the construction and finance of a rail line along the Hudson River. Within a year, the Committee raised the large sum of \$3,000,000 to fund the construction of a rail line connecting Poughkeepsie with New York City. Construction began that year, slowly extending southward. By November of 1848, the railway had only reached Fishkill Landing (the modern town of Beacon).¹⁶

The coming of the railroad was opposed by many of the old families of the Hudson Valley, who feared that the train would cut them off from the river and draw business away from their shipping interests. While no documents survive stating William Reynolds' personal opinion on the railroad, he did work to expand his business during the years the railway was under construction, perhaps hoping that Poughkeepsie's new role as a rail hub would increase river traffic. In 1849, Reynolds constructed a new warehouse at the Upper Landing to accommodate the increased amount of cargo coming into the city. On January 4, 1850, the Hudson River Railway opened, touted in the *Poughkeepsie Telegraph* as a "great public improvement, second only to the New York and Erie Canal."¹⁷ The next day, William and James Reynolds purchased another plot of land (formerly owned by the short-lived Poughkeepsie Silk Company) to expand the docks.

The 1850s were a boom time for the Upper Landing. Newspaper advertisements purchased by William Reynolds hawked goods that had been shipped up from New York City by rail or boat, such as Rhode Island onions, or floated down the D&H Canal, like butter churned in Delaware County. These goods were sold alongside local wares, such as Dutchess County-raised pork. The barges *Clinton* and *Republic*, operated by Doughty, Wilkinson, and Company, were added to the small flotilla sailing in and out of the Upper Landing. These barges carried a varied cargo, ranging from passengers to bat guano (used for its nitrogen by some of the factories at the Upper Landing) to exotic dyewoods.

Perhaps inspired by the success of Doughty, Wilkinson, and Company, William Reynolds commissioned Poughkeepsie's Finch shipyards to construct a new steamship, to be directly owned and operated by the W.W. and J. Reynolds Company. In 1854, this ship, christened the *Reliance*, entered service, freighting goods and passengers back and forth from Albany.¹⁸ The *Reliance* was captained by M.S. Reynolds, a relative of the ship's owner. It ran twice weekly to the state capital, and became a regular fixture on the Albany docks.

Together, these ships did a brisk business at the Upper Landing, bringing goods and passengers to the newly-incorporated (1854) City of Poughkeepsie. They also connected the Upper Landing to the great, bloody epic of the Civil War. Following the attack by Confederate troops on Fort Sumter in 1861, President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers to put down the Southern rebellion. Lincoln's call to arms was announced to the nation on April 15 of that year. Two days later, William Reynolds volunteered the *Reliance* for military service through the New York state government.¹⁹ It also appears that several members of her crew, including the chief and assistant engineers and three other crew members, volunteered for service aboard the ship. The steamship was gratefully accepted, then armed to serve as both a gunboat and troop

transport. On February 6, 1862, the *Reliance* took part in the Union attack on rebel fortifications on Roanoke Island as the prelude for General Burnside's invasion of North Carolina. The short, sharp battle took the island and 2,500 Confederate prisoners for Union and paved the way for an invasion of the Carolina mainland.²⁰ The *Reliance* also supported two landings in the following campaign, at Plymouth and New Bern.

While the *Reliance* was off fighting, the war years brought several changes to the Upper Landing. One of these was that, in April of 1862, W.W. and J. Reynolds became Reynolds and Company. In the meantime, the firm continued to ship out of the Upper Landing. The biggest disruption to business at the Upper Landing during the Civil War came on August 14, 1865. As reported in the *Poughkeepsie Eagle*:

About twelve o'clock last night fire was discovered near the gangway, on board the Barge *Republic* at the Upper Landing. The hands on board of the vessel were aroused from their sleep, and the lines by which the barge was attached to the dock were soon cut, and the vessel drifted down the stream to within a few feet of Arnold's Lumber yard, when she grounded. The *Joseph C. Doughty* ran down to her in order to get her off when she too grounded in a position dangerously near the Barge. Soon after the barge again commenced drifting and finally reached the middle of the river, being at the time enveloped in one sheet of flame. The ferry boat soon got afloat and proceeded to the Brewery dock, took on steam Fire Engine No. 4, and followed the burning vessel. The Barge had considerable freight on board, including 15,000 bushels of salt, valued at \$2,000 or \$3,000. In the office on the boat was a large sum of money, the proceeds of sales all of which was lost. Owing to the lateness of the hour we are unable to give the entire loss or insurance. The fire was evidently the work of an incendiary.²¹

Despite the terrifying details of the account, the *Republic* was repaired in a matter of days, and was once again running to New York by April 18th. The next year, the Civil War finally came to an end.

As the *Reliance* returned to the Upper Landing, life in Poughkeepsie slowly began to return to normal. To celebrate the steamship's role in the war, Reynolds & Company debuted a line of products dubbed "Reynolds Reliance." Despite the celebratory attitude that must have awaited the ship and its crew, difficult days lay ahead. As the nation began to struggle with the

problems of Reconstruction and full-scale industrialization, the river-centric businesses of the Upper Landing struggled to remain relevant in a world increasingly dominated by the railroad.

Chapter 7: The Long Decline

While the arrival of the railroad to Poughkeepsie was originally a boon for the Upper Landing, the ever-growing dominance of freight trains eventually crippled shipping businesses and their dependents at the site. The economic death of the Upper Landing took decades, but progressed in a steady downward slide from the 1870s.

The five years after the end of the Civil War brought rapid change to Poughkeepsie. As immigrants rushed into the city between 1865 and 1870 to work at new businesses like Adriance & Platt Reaper Mower, the city's population increased from 16,073 to 20,080. Increasingly, these business were positioned not at the traditional industrial hub of the Upper Landing, but closer to the rail depot at the foot of Main Street. In 1871, William Reynolds closed the old wooden warehouse his family had run since 1849 in an effort to adjust to the changing nature of commerce in the city. By the 1880s, the building was still standing, being used as a knitting factory.²² In 1872, Reynolds & Company constructed a large brick warehouse opposite the train station on Main Street. Part of this structure still survives, housing several restaurants and businesses.

In 1887, the Reynolds family sold a large chunk of their remaining lands at the Upper Landing. The buyer was an ambitious new venture: the Poughkeepsie Bridge Company. This corporation, formed in 1871, planned to build an elevated railroad bridge across the Hudson at the straight, calm stretch in the river in front of the Upper Landing. The site also offered the benefit of the rocky outcropping of Snake Cliff, which made for a natural landing point for the

bridge, as it had to be elevated high enough in the air so to not interfere with river traffic. George Innis, owner of the dyeworks that had long stood on the Fall Kill and the building formerly known as the Hoffman house, served as one of the founding board members for the Poughkeepsie Bridge Company. Over the next two decades, Innis and the other board members succeeded in attracting a number of engineers and investors to the ambitious project, planned to be the longest bridge in the world when completed.²³ However, the project was beset by a number of financial and technical problems. The Panic of 1873, an economic downturn that struck two years after planning began on the bridge, bankrupted one of the companies that had invested in the venture. Efforts to fund and finish the project occurred throughout the 1870s and 80s, with the project lying completely dormant for eight years. However, the late 1880s saw a renewed effort to finish the bridge. The final design of the project called for several footings in the river and on the shore, including one on the property the Reynolds family sold in 1887.²⁴

While the Reynolds switched their interests elsewhere, the shipping business limped on at the Upper Landing. Following the departure of Reynolds & Co., the firm of Doughty, Cornell & Co. took over the ferry and freight line, sailing the steamer *L. Hasbrouck* out of the Upper Landing. However, advertisements from 1875 onward show the *L. Hasbrouck* and another ship, the *Miller*, running from the Main Street Dock rather than the Upper Landing. This indicates that, by the mid-1870s, the Upper Landing's time as a bustling commercial dock had passed. Following the departure of shipping from the mouth of the Fall Kill, the old dock and warehouse there "slowly rotted away." The last ferries left the Upper Landing in 1879, when the Transportation Company, responsible for running the ferries out of their own small dock, transferred its operations to Main Street.²⁵

While shipping ceased at the Upper Landing, there were still a number of businesses on the banks of the Fall Kill. These, too, faced problems in the turbulent 1870s and 80s. In 1879, the Arnold Chair Company, a long-standing presence at the Upper Landing, was rocked by a labor dispute. On August 22nd of that year, the 300 to 400 women workers at the Arnold factory were told that their wages for making cane-bottomed chairs were being cut from 4 cents per complete chair to 3.5. The women of the factory were outraged and nearly unanimous in their refusal to work at the reduced rate. When a young girl at the factory accepted work at the lower rate, she was attacked by her coworkers. The next day, another worker, this one a middle-aged woman, came to the now-deserted factory and tried to take some work home with her. On her walk home, she was attacked by a mob of or nearly 100 women, who seized the uncompleted chair frames from her. Concerned about the safety of any workers trying to break the strike, Arnold and Company then tried sending a wagon laden with parts to the homes of women willing to accept the reduced rate. This, too, was attacked by the mob of strikers now besieging the factory, and the wagon's driver "was the object of much hooting and yelling, and one or two stones were thrown at him without effect." The strike ended only when management, blaming the need for reduced wages on reduced prices by their competitors, threatened to cease making the cane chairs altogether if they could not produce them at the lower price. Knowing that the closure of the line would put nearly 200 women out of work, the strike ended, and the workers returned to their jobs, "sullen, and [making] sharp remarks about meanness and stinginess as they took the work." The fact that chairs from the Arnold factory were competing with cheaper products made as far away as Phoenicia, New York and Vermont shows both the complexity and difficulty of running a business during this time.²⁶

Despite these troubles, the Arnold Chair Company remained at the Upper Landing until 1935, when it was “the only establishment in the city still using water power from the Fall Kill.”²⁷ It was one of the last institutions remaining at the mouth of the creek. In 1891, the old Fallkill Store, then used as a warehouse by the Poughkeepsie Transportation Company, burned down, taking with it thousands of dollars’ worth of tools and construction materials and, most painfully, “[a] considerable quantity of dye wood piled close to the building... the loss to the Messrs. Innis about \$2,000, on which there was no insurance.”²⁸ The same year also saw the demise of the *Republic*, the old barge that had burned once before during the Civil War. On August 14th, only a few weeks after the Fallkill Store had burned, the deck of the *Republic* collapsed while it was sailing the Hudson, killing several people aboard. The old barge was the last to call the Upper Landing its home.²⁹

Besides the Arnold Chair Company, the only other remaining major business at the Upper Landing by the early 20th century was the Gifford, Sherman, & Innis Dyewoods Company. This business “kept the upper neighborhood busy with frequent shiploads of log wood arriving from the West Indies for some time after the removal of the freight boats and the ferry.” However, this firm, too, fell victim to changing economic times as chemical dyes replaced wood dyes, and fell into bankruptcy in 1884. Business at the dyeworks fitfully stumbled on until 1902, when the New York Railroad Company purchased the remaining structures at the Upper Landing. The factory was torn down in 1905.³⁰

As the last few businesses struggled on at the Upper Landing, the families long-associated with the site began to sell more and more of the land there. In 1894, the Reynolds family sold a piece of property riverward of the Reynolds House to the Poughkeepsie Electric Light & Power Company, which planned to build a power station there. Various construction

efforts continued at this site into the early 1900s, a period which saw the Poughkeepsie Electric Light & Power Company consolidated into a larger concern named the Central Hudson Gas & Electric Company. Central Hudson's expansion at the Upper Landing continued until 1911, when it purchased the remaining property, including the Hoffman and Reynolds houses. These historic structures were used as offices, equipment garages, and storage, and even tenement housing by Central Hudson.³¹

Chapter 8: The Legacy and Resurgence of Upper Landing

Though everything but the Central Hudson power plant had closed at the Upper Landing by the second decade of the 1900s, this important site was not forgotten. Concerned citizens were successful in ensuring that the Hoffman and Reynolds houses, the oldest structures remaining at the site, survived the 20th century to receive renewed attention in the 21st.

The first recognition of the historic significance of the Hoffman House was in Helen Wilkinson Reynolds' book *Dutch Houses in the Hudson Valley Before 1776*. Published in 1929 and featuring an introduction by the recently elected governor of New York Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Reynolds' book connected Hoffman's house to the home constructed by Leonard Lewis in the early 1700s. This book also served as the basis for several newspaper articles written about the Hoffman House in the 1940s and 1960s, which focused less on the building's connection to Poughkeepsie's Dutch heritage and more on the fact that it had served as the home of Walter Livingston, one of New York's most important political figures during the American Revolution.

Attention once again turned to the area around the Upper Landing in 2009. To coincide with the Quadricentennial of Henry Hudson's voyage up the river that now bears his name, the

Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge, closed for decades following a fire on the tracks in 1974, was converted into Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park. The park provides a spectacular pedestrian route between Poughkeepsie and Lloyd on the west bank of the Hudson. Its construction caps nearly two decades of work by concerned citizens, elected officials, and public servants to preserve the Railroad Bridge

The Walkway was an immediate success, yet there were from the beginning plans to improve upon the site. While the Walkway passes over the Poughkeepsie waterfront, it continues nearly another mile into the city, dropping visitors to the site in a neighborhood completely cut off from the scenery and businesses on the banks of the Hudson. It was thus determined that an elevator should be constructed, connecting the Walkway to the disused former industrial site of the Upper Landing beneath it. In 2010, the Hoffman and Reynolds houses and the surrounding 2.7 acres at the Upper Landing were purchased by the Dyson Foundation with plans to convert the property into a public park. Opened in the fall of 2013, this park connects with both the elevator to the Walkway and the Poughkeepsie waterfront. In addition to preserving what was once the industrial heart of Poughkeepsie, this connection will bring visitors to the city's waterfront and the Lower Main neighborhood, making the Upper Landing once again a bustling hub of activity.

¹ William A. Flynt, *A Dendrochronology Study of the Hoffman House, Poughkeepsie, New York*. 2013. Pg. 4.

² "Boards, Brick, Lime, etc., also Grain and Cord-Wood, ordered to be procured, at the request of Quartermaster-General Mifflin, September 30, 1776," in *American Archives*, ed. Peter Force. Retrieved from <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/amarch/getdoc.pl?var/lib/philologic/databases/amarch/.25810>

³ This kind of functional corruption was very much what turned the wheels of 18th century America, and not be viewed as being as morally problematic and modern eyes may find it.

⁴ "Report from Committee on the Letters of General Schuyler, September 28, 1776," in *American Archives*, ed. Peter Force. Retrieved from <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/amarch/getdoc.pl?var/lib/philologic/databases/amarch/.25805>

⁵ Advertisement, April 30, 1798. *Poughkeepsie Journal*

⁶ Advertisement, January 10, 1810. *Poughkeepsie Journal*

⁷ Mesick, Cohen, Wilson, Baker Architects, *The Hoffman and Reynolds Houses: Historic Structure Report* (Millbrook, NY: Dyson Foundation 2013).

⁸ Mesick, Cohen, Wilson, Baker Architects, 46.

⁹ Advertisement, May 5, 1819 *Poughkeepsie Journal*

¹⁰ Advertisement, October 12, 1819, *Poughkeepsie Journal*

¹¹ New York passed two emancipation laws, one in 1799 and the other in 1817. The 1799 law promised freedom to all slaves born after July 4th of that year once they came of age (25 for women, 28 for men). The 1817 law extended freedom to those born before 1799 by 1827, though those born into slavery before 1827 were legally bound to their owners as apprentices until they turned 21 (the new age of majority for men and women). As such, African-Americans may have continued to live in legally unfree conditions until 1848. Patrick Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," in *Slavery in New York*, ed. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris, pg. 124-128

¹² *Poughkeepsie Telegraph*, December 28, 1835

¹³ Edmund Platt, *The Eagle's history of Poughkeepsie from earliest settlements 1683 to 1905 (Poughkeepsie, NY: Platt and Platt, 1905)*. Retrieved from <http://archive.org/details/eagleshistoryofp00plat>

¹⁴ "Meeting of the Trustees together with Freeholders and inhabitants," March 1, 1831.

¹⁵ Architects, et al., 13; Flynt, 4

¹⁶ The diary of runaway slave James F. Brown includes some details of the railway's arrival in Beacon. The original diary is housed at the New York Historical Society, and a transcribed copy can be found at Mount Gulian Historic Site in Beacon.

¹⁷ *Poughkeepsie Telegraph*, January 9, 1850

¹⁸ *Albany Journal*, August 18, 1857

¹⁹ He was joined in this by neighboring Poughkeepsie business owner Matthew Vassar, who similarly volunteered his sloop, the *Matthew J. Vassar*. From Platt, *Eagle's History of Poughkeepsie*

²⁰ Michael Zatarga, "The Battle of Roanoke Island," website of Fort Raleigh National Historic Site. <http://www.nps.gov/fora/historyculture/battleofroanokeisland.htm>

²¹ *Poughkeepsie Eagle*, August 15, 1865

²² "Reynolds & CO., One of Poughkeepsie's Oldest Business," *Poughkeepsie Eagle*

²³ A title the Poughkeepsie Rail Bridge owned for less than a year; A longer bridge over the Firth of Forth opened a few months after the bridge over the Hudson was completed

²⁴ The definitive history of the efforts to construct the Poughkeepsie Rail Bridge is Carleton Mabee, *Bridging the Hudson: The Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge and Its Connect Rail Lines – A Many-Faceted History* (Flieschmanns, New York: Purple Mountain Press 2001)

²⁵ *Sunday Courier*, August 12, 1894; Platt, *Eagle's History of Poughkeepsie*

²⁶ "A CROWD OF FEMALE STRIKERS. Excited Cane-Chair Makers In Poughkeepsie—A Lively Row Followed By Submission," *New York Times*, August 23, 1879

²⁷ Platt, *Eagle's History of Poughkeepsie*; Arnold Lumber Company accounts, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Retrieved from <http://iarchives.nysed.gov/xtf/view?docId=1724.xml;query=;brand=default>

²⁸ *Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle*, July 24, 1891.

²⁹ *Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle*, August 15, 1891

³⁰ Platt, *Eagle's History of Poughkeepsie*

³¹ Mesick, Cohen, Wilson, Baker Architects, 20